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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a discussion of preparation of teachers to work with disadvantaged children. In developing a curriculum for this group of teachers, emphasis should be placed on interdisciplinary academic preparation, experience, and training. Teachers should learn to be respectful, aware, understanding, democratic and encouraging (among other things). Training in the social and behavioral sciences, such as cultural anthropology, social psychology, sociology, linguistics, economics, and political science is essential. (SET)

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THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF TEACHERS OF THE DISADVANTAGED

The concept of "disadvangage" does not set well in the conscience of the American public. It is contrary to the ideals of democracy and the so-called Christian conscience. There are several ways of dealing with this upsetting fact. One way is to deny it. This is accomplished through loud protestations about the land of opportunity, by citations of extraordinary progress in the standard of living of the nation-as-a-whole; by extraordinary ritual and ceremony honoring individual accomplishments. The re-iteration of the ideal as if to make it so by saying it often enough, the statistical orientation that permits us to speak in terms of average or the "nation-as-a-whole," the propensity for comparisons that keep us looking at other societies to see how much better off we are than they, the hero-worship of the achiever--all these mechanisms serve to insulate the majority of American people against the stark realization of the inequities, degradation, and suffering that exist side by side with achievement and affluence. In fact, the cultural pressure is so much against the recognition of poverty and deprivation, that even the poor and deprived are reluctant to admit it. At least, this was the general picture of denial

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until quite recently. It was largely due to the impact of television several months ago in showing the human devastation of hunger in the land that the American public had to stop burying its political and social head in the sand, and face up the fact that we do indeed have a serious case of poverty threatening the health of the nation.

Another mechanism for dealing with the fact of disadvantage in a society that proclaims equal opportunity is to blame the person himself for his predicament and if this is challenged, to blame his ancestry. This is done through embracing stereotypes or assigning the causes to poor stock--poor heredity. We are familiar with the epithets used to describe the slum dwellers, the migrant worker, the mountaineer, the Negro, the poor white, the Puerta Rican, the Mexican laborer, the American Indian. They are "dumb," "lazy," "unambitious," "immoral," "dirty," "destructive," "envious," "dishonest," and above all, "they like it that way." "His father before him was that way and he cannot change." Or, the opposite generalization is made--"if he <u>wanted to</u>, he could make it. Look at me. I made it. He just doesn't care."

A third method of dealing with this contradiction between what is preached and what is seen is to assume a sympathetic attitude on certain occasions by making contributions which

salvage our consciences and enable us to continue to describe our society as one offering opportunity to all. We prepare Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets in our homes, schools, clubs, and churches to be distributed to the poor. We contribute to the Salvation Army at the sound of the bell and music on the streets; we drop a coin in the hat of a street beggar; we might even intercede for those whom we know personally when they are in difficulty with the school, the law, or the welfare worker. There are those among us who have our so-called "favorite" charities--favorite poor if you please. Having cleansed ourselves through this kind of missionary work, we are free to continue to believe in and to talk about democracy and equal opportunities.

There are many more ways of coping with perceptions that are at variance with our accepted and stabilized beliefs but I want to mention here only one other because I feel that it is this method that we are now using. It is the method of eliminating the alien factor by uprooting its causes. Let me return to the impact and follow-up of the documentary TV program on hunger which I mentioned earlier. In perspective, it was a kind of "final blow" to the American conscience. Several pricks to the conscience had already been made, for indeed the poor have been with us always. There had been flurries of interest in the education of the Negro sharecropper,

in the plight of Appalachia, in the California "wetback," in the rats of the inner city. Schools have, for years, been aware of the discrepancies in achievement between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. But, for some reason, the schools have never been in the vanguard of social change. Rather, we have always found ourselves in the position of accommodating to social change. Thus it was not until other social forces--political economic, and international--highlighted and focused the predicament that an active attack was made to eliminate it. Hence the widespread, open, and active interest in the disadvantaged, as if they had only recently been discovered.

Almost by surprise, the schools found themselves with numerous resources at their disposal under various and sundry titles designed to enable them to reach the disadvantaged. It was an all-out war. We were to attack on all fronts beginning with the very young in head start programs, reclaiming the drop-outs through Youth Corp programs, getting the adults back for retraining, redirection and employment, involving the communities through their own organizations for self-improvement. People and communities were designated as target populations, target areas. There is no doubt that activity was furious and interest was high. But did we know what we were doing? Were we prepared to undertake the job in an

effective manner? Did we have trained personnel? The answers to most of these questions is "no." There was no common understanding of objectives, no pool of teachers especially prepared to deal with the learning problems of the disadvantaged, no system of allocation of resources so as to minimize waste, no body of tested theory describing the so-called "target." This was and still is an emergency enterprise, operating largely by armchair strategy.

This brings me finally to my topic: The professional education of teachers of the disadvantaged. I have surveyed the certification requirements for teachers in practically every state in Continental USA. In none of these did I see an outline of required courses and experiences for teachers of the disadvantaged. Not even among special education requirements. How, then, will school administrators go about the employment of teachers for these children? Let's take a look at what has been done. The disadvantaged are usually found together in particular areas. They have a preponderance of undesirable factors for a teaching-learning situation. Therefore, teachers seldom choose to work in the schools in these areas. Then how are teachers found?

(1) "Uncooperative," recalcitrant teachers are sent there as a punitive measure.

(2) Novice teachers with little bargaining power due to their inexperience start there and move as early as possible.

(3) Poorly trained teachers working for additional training begin there, but expect a subsequent promotion out of the situation.

(4) Teachers having personality difficulties who find it hard to get along with their colleagues in the "better" schools are reassigned there.

(5) Idealistic liberals who are always espousing the poor man's cause choose a short stretch there.

(6) The sincerely interested who have exhibited some talent for relating to and teaching these children may settle there.

Obviously, we are face to face with a personnel problem to be solved. Educators differ in their definition of the problem. Some feel that what we need is good teachers. Good teachers can teach children--all children. Others feel that children with special handicaps including cultural handicaps require teachers who are trained to meet these specific needs. Still others see the problem as being that of a ratio of teacher-time per pupil. Given a sufficient number of teacher aides, clerical workers and mediating equipment, if you please, the present teacher can do the job.

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The National Teacher Corps tried to offer a solution by which persons who had finished college, whether in the field of teacher education or not, and who wished to teach the disadvantaged, could enter a training program that provided a summer of intensive training at a training center, to be followed by employment during the regular school year under the supervision of a master teacher of the disadvantaged. At the same time as they taught, they were enrolled in a nearby institution for study toward the master's degree. At the end of this supervised training period, a teacher of the disadvantaged will have been developed. The crucial questions here are (1) What are the criteria by which the subject matter of the program is selected? (2) How are the master teachers selected? (3) What criteria are used in the selection of the trainees other than their ability to pursue a graduate program and their willingness to become a trainee?

Meanwhile, books begin to flood the market--some valuable, some not so valuable; journal articles showing insight, often not showing insight. We begin to see the "band-wagon effect" such as was seen earlier in the mental retardation movement and as we now see in the "learning disabilities" movement. Characteristics of the disadvantaged were generously listed. Some of these have since been repudiated or modified by later

research. Among these are: (1) The disadvantaged do not value education; (2) parents are not interested; (3) the children are nonverbal, or noncommunicative. Experimental programs that have been successful in increasing motivation for study and raising horizons or levels of aspiration and decreasing the drop-out rates have appeared in the literature and on television. Prominent among these have been the Banneker program, the Back-to-School program, The Hope program, Upward Bound programs, the various Work-Study programs for alienated youth, and the Bereiter-Engelmann pre-school program to cite only a few. Nowhere, among all these significant contributions do we find a model program for training teachers of the disadvantaged. Instead, institutions for the preparation of teachers have incorporated courses and seminars relating to the disadvantaged into their regular offerings and have extended their internships and cadet teaching experiences to the ghetto and inner city areas in the hope that the prospective teacher will be able to better understand and teach the disadvantaged child.

I was recently reading an issue of the circular of the Educational Research Service. In discussing school programs for the disadvantaged the issue of staffing was raised. Listen to this statement: "In providing help for the disadvantaged,

many school systems have employed additional guidance counselors, often extending this service down into the lower grades. More remedial teachers are provided. Class size is often reduced by the addition of more teachers. Use is made too of psychologists, speech therapists, school social workers and vocational counselors... Additional assistant principals are sometimes appointed and more clerical help is provided. A new position, that of community agent or community coordinator is established in some schools. The duty of this coordinator is to work with parents, welfare agencies and the general public, acquainting them with the aims of the program..." Early programs reported a variety of inservice training experiences for teachers in order to orient them toward working with children whose backgrounds may be totally foreign to the teachers' own personal experiences. Through publicity and advertising, teachers have been recruited and a few teachers not involved in work with the disadvantaged have asked to be transferred where this work is going on. Does all this sound like a secure and substantial basis for securing teachers professionally trained to teach a special group of children? The challenge is squarely put to our teacher-training institutions. The first step is to determine the kind of teacher needed. We have had the problem well described, the characteristics of the children delineated and the goals of their education outlined. Thelen

predicts that by 1970, one out of every two pupils in large city schools will be culturally disadvantaged.

Let us describe the ideal teacher whom our colleges and universities must strive to develop.

1. She respects the children in her class and they in turn respect her.
2. She is aware of various family structures from which the children come.
3. She is aware of how ethnic group membership shapes the child's image of himself.
4. She has a sophisticated understanding about the assessment of a child's abilities.
5. She knows that language is closely tied to the life one leads.
6. He meets the disadvantaged child on equal terms, person to person.
7. He transmits to his pupils his belief in their latent abilities.
8. He is honest--he doesn't sentimentalize, doesn't pretend that work or behavior is good when it isn't.
9. His personality, his program, and his materials are well organized--One may not see a study guide around.
10. She rewards each tiny upward step but withholds harsh criticism even when no progress can be discerned.

11. She is adept at setting standards just high enough to stretch the efforts; not high enough to frustrate.
12. He has extensive knowledge of the subject he teaches and of cognate areas.
13. He is experimental--always trying out what promises to be a better way to approach an unsolved problem.
14. He is in touch with the world in which his pupils must function as self-sufficient citizens.
15. She is mature, consistent, encouraging, dependable.
16. Her classroom atmosphere reflects an ordered flexibility.

Where can such teachers be found? They are yet to be developed through new, bold, interdisciplinary programs of professional training. At least 1/3 of the curriculum should be made up of courses in the behaviorial sciences--cultural anthropology, social psychology, and sociology. By far, the overriding necessity is that the prospective teacher of the disadvantaged develop the impartial, nonjudgmental attitude of the cultural anthropologist who is able to view cultural differences with poise, respect, and understanding. Cognate courses in sociology, linguistics, and social psychology, should provide insight into various family structures and their effects upon the developing personality--the matriarchial family, the

family in which both parents work, the extended family with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins around, the crowded conditions and lack of privacy, the absence of creature comforts and of social amenities. Understanding of ethnic groups is mandatory--their customs, history, and traditions; their status in American society with the attendant blocks and frustrations they face. A study of linguistics would make clear the role of language as an expression of social perceptions and the fact that its form is dictated by the realities of social exchanges, each culture having its own currency. Linguistics would also reveal how effective the functional language is in categorizing the actual experiences of the disadvantaged group. Social psychology would enable the prospective teachers to come to grips with prejudices, stereotypes, and the motivational force of attitudes. Courses in differential psychology would provide the basis for a sound assessment of abilities, aptitudes and talents. The teacher would gain a sophisticated perception of the nature of intelligence and the processes of learning and consequently divest his mind of the denigrating propaganda that paints a picture of inborn stupidity in disadvantaged groups.

Careful study of perception and perceptual motor development along with the neurological foundations underlying the

0013

cognitive processes would help immeasurably in the diagnosis and remediation of reading problems--an area so greatly emphasized as a deficit area for the disadvantaged.

Other social sciences fundamental in the professional education of teachers of the disadvantaged include government and economics. These are the vital areas from which the disadvantaged have been systematically excluded. If they were politically active, and economically sophisticated, they would not be a target group. Teaching political "know-how" will be an increasingly significant area of responsibility for the teacher of the disadvantaged. To do this, he must understand social stratifications, the avenues of mobility, the "in's and out's" of city and state government, the laws governing civil, social, and property rights. Such simple practices as budgeting, buying and borrowing have been sources of untold misery in the lives of the poor because of the exploitation of loan sharks and high pressure salesmen with their "enjoy now-pay later" payment plans. The education of the disadvantaged must include at least a modicum of economic understanding.

Education takes place within a matrix of political as well as educational philosophy. In order for the prospective teacher to set realistic objectives, he must base them upon

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some meaningful socio-political philosophy. Ours is a philosophy of democracy and of the dignity of the individual. The educational philosophy should be compatible with and complementary to the societal ideals. Finally, the principles of democracy should undergird both teaching methods and community responsiveness if the societal goals are to be implemented. Thus a major segment of the prospective teacher's preparation would be a study of philosophy of American education and the history of its implementation through various educational, governmental and community plans.

Joseph K. Hart has beautifully stated this objective: "The democratic problem in education is not primarily a problem of training children, it is a problem of making a community in which children cannot help growing up to be democratic, intelligent, disciplined to freedom, reverent to the goods of life--eager to share in the tasks of the age. A school cannot produce this result. Only a community can do it."

If I seem to be overemphasizing the role of the social and behavioral sciences in the preparation of the teacher of the disadvantaged, it is because I firmly believe in the necessity of having these disciplines in the primary position. I am convinced that the insights gained into the nature and

structure of our social system and into the relationship between culture and personality are far more important in understanding the disadvantaged child than the memorization of recipe-like techniques for getting children to learn. The teacher, herself, as a knowledgeable person, is the crux of the learning situation.

This is not to say that certain other courses, technically referred to as professional educational courses, must not be a part of the curriculum. Chief among these professional courses is human growth and development which describes the human growth processes in all their stages--pre-natal to death. Not only must the facts of age changes be understood in all the aspects of development, but also the known factors contributing to healthy growth must be understood. Factors such as nutrition, housing, employment, health and recreation cannot be ignored; nor can group membership, rapid social changes and the technological impact be omitted. In other words, it must be clearly understood that growth and development take place within a social matrix.

Another significant area might be called the dynamics of learning. A thorough understanding of the nature, conditions, and economy of learning including motivation and effective reinforcements would be included here. Not the least in importance here is the recognition of individual differences in

cognitive styles and the development of flexibility in teaching procedures in deference to these learning styles. For example, the disadvantaged child is said to have a "slow style"; he is a "late bloomer," perhaps one-track minded, often inductive and concrete in arriving at generalizations. Despite his style, according to Riesmann, he often is found to be creative and ultimately makes a significant contribution to society.

Mental hygiene should be included in the preparation of the teacher of the disadvantaged with the aim of sensitizing her to wholesome group climates and to qualities of personal and social adjustment. Recognition of frustrations and the child's coping patterns and the application of sound counseling techniques for building ego-strength and positive self-images may occupy a goodly portion of the daily responsibilities of this teacher.

Finally we come to areas of specialization and teaching methods. Those who plan to teach bilingual children should study the appropriate foreign language, so that the child can be communicated to in the language he brings to school. The technical aspects of curriculum development, selection of appropriate teaching materials, and mastery of teaching methods and procedures for developing basic learning skills must be

included. Above all, practicum experiences with disadvantaged children should begin with the freshman year and extend through the fifth year which would be the culminating internship. Close cooperation between the college or university and a group of master teachers chosen because of demonstrated success in teaching the disadvantaged can be insured by joint appointment to the faculty of the training institution and that of the public school. There should be specialization even within internships for this special group of teachers. For example, some will find that their talent lies in teaching bilingual groups, such as Puerta Ricans or Mexican-Americans. Others will prefer schools of the inner city. Still others may be interested in Appalachia. Each segment of the disadvantaged population is sufficiently different to warrant a specialized internship with some curriculum modifications.

The challenge of all-out professional preparation for teachers of the disadvantaged has not, so far, been squarely met. Somehow, we are still hoping that the gesture of in-service training will remold the same teacher who has created the present blocks to the education of the underprivileged into an effective teacher of the now alienated pupil. Moreover, we expect some administrative rearrangement of our present personnel to meet the need. Can this procrastination be

due to the essential conservatism of the schools, to their fear of change, or to their rejection of the disadvantaged as a cancer in the otherwise best of all societies?

To summarize: I have pointed out the unpleasant reality of poverty and unequal opportunity in the most affluent society on earth. I have indicated the concern of the government to tackle the problem -- a concern that is late and often grudgingly admitted. Nevertheless, sufficient political action was taken to legislate financial support for widespread attacks on the problems of the poor--health, employment and education. It appears that the school, instead of being at the cutting edge of social change, is consistently found bringing up the rear. Thus, the leadership in meeting the needs of society is often spontaneous, uninformed, superficial, and in the hands of enthusiastic laymen or traditional educators who find it impossible to get out of a familiar rut. The urgent and pressing challenge in teacher education today is to develop and offer a first class curriculum for the preparation of teachers of the disadvantaged. This calls for strident moves in new directions with emphasis upon interdisciplinary academic preparation and cooperation between the college and the public schools in order to give prospective teachers realistic understanding and rigorous training for

effective teaching of the disadvantaged child.

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